

**EAST STROUDSBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION
POLICY REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING
FEBRUARY 26, 2024
CARL T. SECOR ADMINISTRATION CENTER & VIA ZOOM—4:30 P.M.
MINUTES**

- I. Meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Keith Karkut.
- II. **Policy Committee Members Present were:** George Andrews, Jason Gullstrand, Keith Karkut, and Debbie Kulick.
- III. **School Personnel Present were:** Brian Baddick, Brian Borosh, Eric Forsyth, Manvel Page, Debra Wisotsky, and Steve Zall.
- IV. **Members of the Board Present were:** Wayne Rohner.
- V. **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE: Motion was made by Debbie Kulick to approve this agenda for February 26, 2024 (pages 1-2), with members of the Committee reserving the right to add to the agenda and take further action as the Committee deems appropriate. Motion was seconded by George Andrews and carried unanimously, 4-0.

VI. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE: Motion was made by Jason Gullstrand to approve the minutes for January 22, 2024 (pages 1-5). Motion was seconded by Debbie Kulick and carried unanimously 4-0.

VII. **POLICIES FOR DISCUSSION:**

Policies presented by administration-

- a. Policy 137 Home Education—Mr. Karkut shared it looks like we are doing some housecleaning of titles in the policy. Mr. Forsyth said yes and the main reason we brought this policy to the Board is under Section 4 Guidelines on page 1, you will see the addition of unsworn declaration. Up until this point, it has been the Board’s policy to require a notarized affidavit from the parent or guardian. There is also guidance from the PA Department of Education (PDE) in their home education and tutoring guide that indicates it can be an unsworn declaration or notarized affidavit. Similarly, school code allows that choice to go to the Board. The reason we are recommending the switch to unsworn declaration as an additional option is because number one, there is no funding attached to those who choose to do this with registrants of the school district and two, because what can seemingly be conflicting guidance with PDE’s publication. We have parents who submit the unsworn declaration and then wonder why the district is contacting them for a notarized affidavit. It is simply because the district’s policy requires it. We think this will make it easier, we have no driving force here to require that particular document to be notarized since the State accepts it in either format and parents can submit them on our home education’s self-service portal as well. Mr. Karkut asked are we checking the information anyway, doesn’t matter notarized or not, are we following up with their application. Mr. Forsyth said if you look at a home education application regarding the program, it’s the signature of the parent indicating that they are providing the instruction during that year. Where the verification comes with that is when they submit their independent evaluation from their certified teacher who reviews that program at the end of the year. It simply says they did what they swore they did. Mr. Andrews asked don’t we have to know who the evaluators of the program are? Mr. Forsyth replied, we don’t have to know them up front, but the evaluator’s name must be submitted by a specific deadline. We then know who it is and have a way of vetting those by checking their certification in the Teacher Information Management System. Mr. Andrews asked when the deadline is. Mr. Forsyth said, it is the end of the school year, June 30 but the affidavit must be submitted by August 1st. Those aren’t the district’s guidelines; those are from the State statute. There were no further concerns with this policy.

- b. Policy 214 Class Rank (clarification on final updates from last month--on Regular Board agenda for approval later this evening)—Mr. Forsyth stated we are clarifying the titles where it says students, his or her, and their. We also had some clarification in the top paragraph on page two of three where we simply made sure the words said what they mean, some of the sentences were duplicative of each other, so I worked with Deb to clarify those. It's substantially the same as what it said before, but it is the final language version we will have on the agenda. Mr. Karkut asked does this qualify for a reposting for public review? Mr. Forsyth stated no, the requirement of law and your policy is that a policy that is going to be voted on at a particular board meeting, simply appear on two consecutive agendas. You can make changes as a committee to those policies all the way through, it just must be out there for the public to know you are discussing it at two consecutive agendas. It is not relevant to the number of changes that have been made. If you do look at the bottom of that paragraph where it says eligibility for all school-based awards that are reliant upon the class rank and/or GPA will be determined by the end of May, our Curriculum & Instruction Department asked for that clarification to be placed in here because it will also appear in the Program of Studies. That is a change from when it used to occur, because it was by the end of the third marking period; however, now that we are including the dual credit courses, it doesn't provide sufficient time for the grades to come back from the colleges. It simply indicates the GPA determinations will not occur until the end of May and shall include grades up to and including the third marking period of each academic year and any dual credit courses. It's the work that is completed for other courses at the end of the third marking period, not new, it's always been that way, but it is extended until the end of May to allow for those dual credit courses to have been received and calculated. There were no further concerns with this policy.
- c. Policy 216 Student Records—Mr. Karkut noted the rewording and housekeeping of titles. Mr. Forsyth stated the substantive changes appear on page fifteen of seventeen. I don't think we have visited these fees in decades, and I think the Board will appreciate the simplification we are looking for. Very soon, based upon the subscription we will have on the new Parchment platform, it will allow us to process student records to alumni and learners, which are currently enrolled students, free of charge. The district pays an annual fee that allows all those to be received as is currently paid for by the learners and alumni. That would mean we wouldn't have to be in the business of collecting additional monies from people for something that now doesn't cost us anything beyond the investment we've already made to make sure those records are available digitally. The exception would be requests by third parties. The district receives and processes a number of requests that could be handled through this new automated means as well as employment verifications, simple education verifications from a prospective employer, law enforcement or other divisions that may need to obtain that information upon proper signature from the student. Those are always at a cost. Under our current contract with Parchment, that would cost the district \$12.75 per request. Customarily, the agencies that use those services have the third party pay for that and then some to try and recover some of the costs from the free requests that they are granting to their students. It is customary for Parchment providers to charge as much as \$25.00 per verification to the third party. That is what they are in the business of doing. I can also let you know as we serve up many requests to certain medical information facilities and other entities, they often send us an invoice that is already set for \$25.00. That is what they expect us to charge, and we do that for the district. Every time we see someone willing to pay that as a third party, not the student or alumni, we charge them that. What we are asking the Board to do here is approve a policy that would eliminate the fees to our students whether they graduated, once were here or are currently here, but continue to charge the fees that the district will be charged for third-party requests and name whatever number they would like to in that highlighted blank, just knowing that \$12.75 of that cost is going to go to the provider. If we are going to say \$25.00, the district is going to receive \$12.25 because \$12.75 goes to the provider. That is why we brought it to the Board for consideration. Ms. Kulick stated I think the industry standard is \$25. Mr. Forsyth said it is, we see it on the paper documents we receive, and Parchment just shared it with us. They say others go for more, so it is totally up to the Board's discretion as to what they want to do. Ms. Kulick stated we can say \$25 or \$30. Mr. Karkut asked how many third-party requests do we get in a given year? Mr. Forsyth replied, I don't have that statistic with me, but it is several a week that we receive that way. Mr. Karkut asked how much time does it take for our staff to complete that request. Mr. Forsyth replied, under this model it is going to be handled through the Parchment system. Our student records are being uploaded into it and they handle the vetting process for the requestor. They are going to charge that person \$12.75 if we said zero, because that is what they do; however, our portion of the cost to Parchment for providing the services for students free each year is roughly \$1,600. If you receive a hundred requests in a year, you would be getting close to paying for that even at a \$25 level because you'd be receiving \$1,275 to put it in perspective, if that helps to quantify what we need to charge. We can certainly come back after a year and say, hey, last year we received X dollars in fees, and it exceeded

your outlay. Ms. Kulick added at \$30 we would be even closer to the \$1,600 to save our taxpayers dollars on third-party requests. Mr. Karkut expressed concern that they are still pertaining to our students or past students even though they are third-party requests? Mr. Forsyth replied, student records all pertain to our students. The difference is it is not a student applying to a college who is requesting that transcript be sent there, that is free. It is a third party whom they have authorized to receive that directly usually for purposes of employment, disability verification or any other reason. Mr. Andrews stated but it is still for our students. If we don't send it to them, the student probably won't be hired. Ms. Kulick stated, we send it regardless. Mr. Karkut added it still helps to recover the cost of the software that we are utilizing, and I believe \$30 is not out of the ordinary so we don't have to come back in a year and say the industry standard is now \$30 and we said \$25. Mr. Forsyth added you may be pleasantly surprised, and we come back to you and say we served up 250 of these instead of 100 and you've exceeded that. Just remember, roughly \$1,600 for the portion of Parchment's cost that allows us to never charge for our students. Mr. Karkut shared I like not having to charge our students. Mr. Forsyth shared Parchment's cost as a whole is larger than the \$1,600 fee for those that wish to make it free to our students, which is a positive thing to do. Mr. Andrews asked will we receive a record of the funds and where they go. Mr. Forsyth assured the committee it comes into the General Fund. Even more so, we will have a report from Parchment. Mr. Karkut asked for a report at the end of the year to see how much we actually incurred. Mr. Forsyth said the system is just launching now, so keep that in mind. Our fiscal year is nearly over, so we may want to wait until the 24-25 school year to come back and look at that date span specifically and see where we are at. The committee all agreed to set the fee at \$30 for third-party requests. There were no further concerns with this policy.

- d. Policy 904 Public Attendance at School Events—Mr. Karkut read the revisions to page 4 of 7 under the “Expected Behaviors” item 11. “Individuals attending school events on district property will not: Possess or use weapons or dangerous devices prohibited by the district except when under the control of law enforcement acting in their official capacity in conjunction with a lawful supervised school activity or course or when possessed for other lawful purposes.[18][19]”. Mr. Forsyth also noted the new references at the end of the policy. Mr. Karkut asked if this is a recommendation of PSBA or is it our recommendation? Mr. Forsyth replied that it is a recommendation of Chief Mill. This is a clarification because there have been instances in the district where we have had law enforcement personnel that may attempt to attend an event without meeting the qualifications and our security department has to intercede and explain when it is and isn't allowed. The language, even though it is in the law, is not clearly articulated in the policy and that is a concern. Mr. Karkut asked for someone to see if Chief Mill was in the building to discuss. He said, I am interpreting that if a Stroud Regional Police Officer, let's say for reference purposes, is on duty and in uniform stops at a basketball game to see their son or daughter play, what does that do for him as a police officer. Does he need to take his gun off to come into our building? Mr. Forsyth said the operative word you may have used there is “on duty”, so I will defer to the Chief on that. Ms. Kulick said I believe that if they are off duty, then they shouldn't. Mr. Karkut said if they are off duty, I'm sure they wouldn't be carrying their weapon. Ms. Kulick replied that she was aware of an issue at North. Mr. Forsyth said based on this particular situation the answer can be different. Mr. Karkut said for the record, I did not pick on Stroud Regional, I just used them for a reference because that's our local department that has jurisdiction. Mr. Forsyth said I will let the Chief explain because they could be in uniform, be armed and be a law enforcement officer from New York or New Jersey.

Chief Mill arrived and asked, what is the question? Mr. Karkut inquired, why we are adding this specific language to policy and what is the purpose of it. Chief explained, the purpose is one, we have had several times, for instance a Sheriff from New Jersey came to one of our football games and was carrying a weapon. How do I know that Sheriff is not there for some other reason? Second, if I get into something with someone, I want to know who is going to have a gun and who is not. We also had a Monroe County Sheriff try to get onto the football field at the North graduation. I asked him where he was going; you can't carry a weapon on school property. He was out of his county and jurisdiction. The problem is we don't want anyone coming in unless they have an official reason to come. Even a local police officer on duty, unless he has an official reason to be here, then he must put the gun in the car. The less guns we have, the better off we are. I don't know who that person is or what his qualifications are. I know our guys, but I don't know what theirs are. Mr. Gullstrand inquired, so when we say official capacity, in a sense what you are saying is when they were invited to us by you to work. Chief said, for instance our probation officer, he carries a gun all the time because he is in the building on official duty working with the kids. That's fine. Way back in the day, we had a constable whose sister used to come pick up the kids and she was always carrying her weapon. She can't do that. The district has the authority through the Superintendent to not allow weapons on school property. Mr. Andrews asked are we going to end up

in a lawsuit if someone gets shot and there is an officer there that is not supposed to carry by law, is the parent going to sue us. Chief replied absolutely not. Mr. Gullstrand asked if we were going to have a large event could we invite the police to help out, they are officially here and can carry that's okay, correct. Chief said yes, but someone who just comes in to hang out and watch a game and has a weapon and are off duty then no. We had an FBI agent once. He was told he couldn't carry on school property. Mr. Karkut said some of our outlying schools such as Smithfield in State Police territory if they know we are having an event will come on our property just to check things out. Are we saying they can't. Chief said that is not what we are talking about. We are talking about coming to events, like coming here tonight, I don't want anyone here except me that has a gun because I don't know their purpose. Just because they are law enforcement officers doesn't mean they don't have ill intent. It can be someone who doesn't like someone and he's here for that purpose. If I allow him to come in here and something would happen, then we have a problem. We don't have it a whole lot, but we do run into it from time to time. Like when that Sheriff came. That was out of the ordinary, he wanted to show off. We don't need that. We don't need a Passaic County officer coming to football games with a weapon. Again, I don't know what he is there for. Better to be safe than sorry. Mr. Gullstrand said so the purpose is to just clarify it in policy.

Mr. Karkut shared, since we are on this policy, I need some clarification on personal belongings and searches. I've heard many comments from the public and to be quite frank, we are one of a very few school districts in our region that are doing this. Chief responded that Pleasant Valley and Bethlehem are doing it. Mr. Karkut asked are we doing it at every school event? Chief responded, we are doing it. For instance, for conferences, we tell the public in advance they can't bring large bags or bookbags. The worst thing in the world is for me to stand and see all those bookbags in the bleachers at the basketball game and wonder what is inside them. Parents are fine with this procedure. I haven't received any complaints. Tell me who they are, and I'd be glad to speak with them. Mr. Karkut spoke of an instance with his wife at a chorus concert at Middle Smithfield being told she couldn't bring in a small purse. They did search it and let her in. This says no purses, so by letting her in, she didn't pull rank and say I'm Keith Karkut's wife. What I'm getting at is if you have a girls soccer game, the visiting team brings their backpacks. We are not checking their backpacks. Chief replied we are not checking the visiting teams' backpacks. If you want us to do, then we'll do it. You tell the district what you would like us to do, you're the Board. Mr. Karkut said for clarification, I'm a professional photographer, it says I can't bring my bag with my camera and all my lenses. Ms. Kulick replied, Keith, that's not what we're saying, it can be subject to search. Chief agreed, as long as we go through the bag and everything is good, then we let you in. Mr. Karkut said it reads, "cameras and cell phones will be permitted if carried loosely or in an approved clear bag". Ms. Kulick said but if you're a professional. Mr. Karkut interrupted but it doesn't say that in this policy. Chief said if you brought in a bag and we search it, do you think we are not going to let you in?

Ms. Kulick stated we have a spot for kids to leave their bookbags. Mr. Karkut said that's another thing I am concerned with. A high school kid comes to school with a backpack that was not searched to attend school, then they want to stop and watch a game after school, we say you can't bring your backpack. What do they do with it? Chief replied, athletics takes care of that. Mr. Karkut asked are we properly tagging that backpack. Chief said, I do not want backpacks in that venue because I don't know what is in them. If something occurs, it's going to be why didn't I check the backpack. They don't allow them at Liberty or Pleasant Valley. Mr. Andrews asked who is responsible when a backpack is stolen from where you put them all. Chief said you would need to speak with athletics. Sooner or later, they get the idea to not bring the backpack. He said, I don't care how we do this, I'm looking out for the safety of everyone. If it's a problem, then don't pass it and we won't do it and then when something happens who is going to be at fault. It is going to be us, and ultimately me. Mr. Karkut stated we check backpacks when they come to school on a random basis, why can't we just say subject to random searches at any event. You trust our kids to bring them to school but not to a basketball game. Chief replied, I'd be happy to check every kid that comes to school, but you won't be able to start school until ten o'clock. At an event it is not a big issue. Mr. Gullstrand shared I think what you're both saying is that we don't know that a kid coming into any sporting event is a student of the district or another school district; therefore, we don't feel comfortable with that. According to what you also say, it is up to the athletic department to secure the backpack, almost like a coat check, and that will protect those students. There are instances where kids stay after school and watch the event. I agree with not bringing the bags in and the searches, but we do also have kids from other school districts bringing things in. I understand both sides of the argument and I agree that having something in place where we know they're secure. Mr. Karkut interrupted but we need to have a procedural guideline of how we are going to do it. Chief asked when was the last time he

went to a Penn State game. Mr. Karkut said I'm not against safety and you know that. I'm one of the first people to say we need police in our schools, I like safety for our staff and students, everyone in attendance. For instance, going to Dorney Park. Dorney requires no backpacks, but they follow it every day. My point is if we are going to follow this, we must do it everywhere and every day in all our schools. Chief said we are. Mr. Karkut said we are not. Chief said let me know what building that is. Mr. Andrews stated you said it is athletics' responsibility for the backpacks. What if it is a play or a band concert? Chief said the Superintendent and I had that discussion, how can you not do it for one but not do it for others. I get what you're saying, it is a play and all the parents and so forth. Mr. Andrews said this is a discrimination. Chief said it is discrimination if I do it for one and not the other. It is not if we do it for all. It is a different world that we live in today. Do you think I want to give the ALICE training to these kids every year. I don't like doing it, but I must, so they are prepared. I just don't want to see anything happen on my watch. Every venue I go to, if I go to a concert or a sporting event, they check you. I was down in Reading for basketball. They checked every single person to make sure they didn't have a weapon. I am appealing to the Board to make it as safe as possible. Mr. Karkut replied I want it to be safe as well, but we must give some convenience, make sure it is fair for all and I don't think we are at this point. Chief replied we are not patting anyone down we are simply checking their bags. Mr. Karkut asked why one school uses the metal detector and others don't. Chief said if they are not doing it at every school, then we need to change that. No one has called my office to say they don't like this. I've gotten more compliments. If some folks complain it is an inconvenience, better an inconvenience than something happening. We didn't do it at football games because we just started this during basketball season. We will incorporate it into football as well. As a law enforcement professional, safety first. Mr. Karkut said we have 50 plus band students coming in with instruments in bags and players with football duffel bags. Chief said we have cheerleaders coming in from other schools, they must keep their bags in the locker. We don't check those, but they are told to keep them in the locker. I don't trust anyone. Most of the people getting shot are getting shot by juveniles. It is a good policy. If I go to another school, I never take my weapon with me. Mr. Andrews stated most are not being shot at sporting events. It is in the schools during the school day. Ms. Kulick stated we can ask athletics for the sports policy or procedure they follow. Mr. Karkut said, just to clarify, so if anyone from the public has their fancy camera bag equipment, your people will search it and permit them to come in. Chief said no problem. Ms. Kulick stated if one comes to the door with camera equipment, that's different than having to go through 200 bags where we would need more staff. Mr. Karkut stated he would share some of the texts he gets from parents. Mr. Andrews inquired whether we need more security people at events because it is labor intensive. Chief stated his staff are getting so good at it now and they're getting people in much quicker. People know the policy now, so they are not bringing the bags with them to events. Mr. Karkut thanked Chief Mill for the clarification and keeping everyone safe.

Public Participation: None

VIII. ADVISORY RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE: Motion was made by Debbie Kulick to authorize and direct the administration to post the following item(s) with noted revisions for PUBLIC REVIEW during the month of February and subsequent Board action in March: **Policies 137, 216, and 904. Policy 214 is on the Regular agenda later this evening for final approval.** Motion was seconded by George Andrews and carried unanimously 4-0.

IX. **ADJOURNMENT:** 5:14p.m.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMITTEE: Motion to adjourn was made by George Andrews. Motion was seconded by Debbie Kulick and carried unanimously, 4-0.

Next meeting: March 18, 2024, at 4:30p.m. in the Carl T. Secor Administration Center Board Room

Respectively submitted by,
Debra Wisotsky